

Planning for resilient urbanisation

The Commonwealth People's Forum (CPF) is a biennial event held prior to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. CPF 2015 took place on 23-26 November 2015 and was jointly organised by the Government of Malta (host) and the Commonwealth Foundation. CPF 2015 critically explored policy based actions under the theme of "What Makes Resilient Societies?" It provided an innovative opportunity for civil society organisations to share knowledge and learn from each other as well as to interact with governance institutions on key policy issues. The CPF2015 series elaborates on the issues covered in the Malta Declaration on Governance for Resilience.

Introduction

More than half of the world's population now lives in cities and by 2050 the proportion is expected to rise to 70%. Cities are home to extreme deprivation and environmental degradation with one billion people living in slums and informal settlements. At the same time, approximately 75% of global economic activity is urban; as the urban population grows, so will the urban share of global GDP and investments.

characteristics of governance systems were identified, particularly at the local and national level, that need to be in place to enable the inclusion of all sectors of the urban social landscape.

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Key discussion points

During the CPF 2015 session, *Planning for Resilient Urbanisation*, Commonwealth civil society, experts and policymakers explored three related questions: What are the Commonwealth specific aspects that can be identified within the global urbanisation trend? What are the governance requirements at the local and national levels that enable people's participation in planning? And how can participatory planning processes in cities and human settlements contribute to building resilience? Through shared experiences, the

Urbanisation is a leading global trend that will have profound long-term impacts. Three presentations illustrated the types of actions that are needed to pursue resilient urbanisation. The first described the evolution of the Makoko Floating School in the Lagos Lagoon, Nigeria and the other two presentations focused on the demographic, economic and other challenges faced by decision-makers, particularly local government urban planners and decision-makers, in building resilient cities.

An excerpt from the Malta Declaration on Governance for Resilience

22. Urbanisation is a leading global trend with long term impacts. We welcome SDG 11 which calls for cities and human settlements which are inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; and which call for processes that enhance people's participation. Many Commonwealth cities are home to extreme deprivation and environmental degradation. Globally one billion people live in slums, with nearly 70 percent of the world's capital cities located near water. This together with climate change and risks posed by flooding represents an enormous and growing risk for cities and urban development. Population growth rates, aging population, growing urban unemployment, changes in patterns of human settlements, food security and transport and access to infrastructure are all significant issues of relevance in planning for resilient urbanisation.

23. Achieving resilient urbanization and planning for sustainable human settlements requires inclusive people's participation. An ultimate goal in planning for resilient urbanisation is to work with governments and communities to ensure informed decisions are made in a democratic process. Resilient urban planning necessitates working across a range of technical professions; helping governments look at and understand risk; and helping communities by understanding their needs during planning.

24. Planning for resilience is not a neutral technocratic process, but an inclusive one, bringing all stakeholders to the table. New relationship structures need to be built to allow for partnerships between Local Government, women, youth, communities, and the private sector. Also, national/local government coordination needs to be strengthened. Consensus and buy-in can help Local Governments to leverage national government and private funding for continued services and to avoid misappropriation of public spaces and resources. Good practices such as the example of the floating school platform project in Nigeria illustrates the opportunities to plan for resilient urbanization, highlighting innovation, and the use of adaptive technology.

Key Issues

Four key challenges

Urban planners must factor in four key challenges in today's planning:

1. the rapid pace of population growth rates,
2. aging populations,
3. food security, and,
4. transport infrastructure and public services

People's participation

The session cited people's participation as an essential element of planning for sustainable cities and human settlements. From the earliest stages of planning, stakeholder consultation and the inclusion of local communities' perspectives is critical. This should be followed through into governance structures that are responsive to local communities' needs. This objective has been articulated in SDG 11 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which calls for inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements. Goal 11 also calls for processes that enhance people's participation.

Not a neutral technical process

Experience across the Commonwealth shows that planning for resilient urbanisation is not a neutral technical process. Planning itself is a governance construct, requiring interaction with many stakeholders. Planning constitutes a complex, inclusive, integrated, participatory and multi-faceted set of planning and governance processes and systems that bring forward hidden voices and the perspectives, needs, challenges and solutions discerned by and among the most vulnerable people and communities. Planning for urban resilience requires multi-level governance and participatory systems and necessitates collaboration not only between local communities and local governments, but also coordination and integrated policy approaches within and across national and local governments. It involves stakeholders, working collectively, to address an array of both demographic and developmental challenges.

Understanding complex urban ecosystems

Effective and resilient urban planning requires the ability of governments and communities to understand the complexity of urban 'ecosystems' and how they are used and can be integrated. Rather than isolate planning for economic infrastructure and commerce, there needs to be a holistic perspective, connecting the economic with social amenities and environmental infrastructure. To help make these connections, the session emphasised the nexus between planning, innovation and the use of adaptive technology. Achieving resilient urban planning requires working across a range of technical professions to examine connections, linkages and examine and assess risk and hazards.

Learning from lived experiences of most vulnerable

Local communities, particularly those in informal settlements, face enormously detrimental hazards, such as pollution, flooding and compounded effects due to climate change. This has become a constant situation - living in crisis with dire human and financial consequences. Resilience should not be understood as the ability to withstand and recover from such hazards. Instead of just coping, a more effective approach is to learn from the lived experiences of the most vulnerable communities and subsequently, through planning for resilience, to plan how to prevent future crises, positively manage hazards and move forward and better.

Roles, Challenges and Opportunities for Local Governments

Local governments are at the centre of both the governance and policy systems and processes required to plan for, achieve and manage resilient cities. They are also at the interface with national government and with local communities. Key priorities for local governments in planning for resilience in urbanisation include addressing the fact that by 2030 there will be millions of additional people seeking employment and services in urban areas. Changes in human settlement patterns will continue whether due to people seeking better economic opportunities, climate refugees or

other migration reasons. These changes will bring about new issues and challenges in planning for resilient urbanisation. Successfully building and managing the relationships, policy processes and governance frameworks that ensure cohesion and collaboration across all levels of government as well as with local communities is crucial in achieving urban resilience. The development of national urban policies and their integration and implementation at local level is key. This requires a strong participatory process that is inclusive, that captures the inputs and perspectives of those living in local communities, including in informal settlements, as well as those who do not normally participate in the citizen dialogue.

Inclusive, consultative processes and participatory governance systems can strengthen resilience by helping create consensus and buy-in; and in doing so help local governments to leverage national government and private funding for continued services and to avoid misappropriation of public spaces. City managers need to go beyond being subject experts and instead serve to integrate community and local government perspectives and needs within a common vision for community planning. This necessitates integrating local economic planning, considering the livelihoods of people and facilitating their sustainability. Some processes such as gender mainstreaming and conducting Environmental Impact Assessments can also contribute to this democratic process.

While local governments are crucial agents of change at local and community level, they must operate in a complex policy landscape. Although local leadership is key, there is a need to recognise that decisions relevant to planning happen at many levels: national, state, local or community. There is therefore a tension between national and local governments. Interconnectedness of governance systems and policy-making is key in planning for resilient urbanisation. Local governments can also support horizontal linkages within government, thereby providing policy cohesion and sustainability, by being part of the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of SDG Goal 11.

Building inclusive systems of governance means challenging traditional donor-recipient relationships between local government (donor) and communities (recipient). Shifting to a more horizontal relationship allows for new approaches and different partners to work together. In this way, greater integration of local community and local government policymakers' perspectives will be channelled into policy formulation and contribute to building more effective and more inclusive planning for urban resilience.

Conclusion

Planning for resilient urbanisation is not a neutral technocratic process and can only be achieved through inclusive people's participation, which integrates planning, governance and policy frameworks. This is by no means straightforward. The challenge is a complex one but crucial nevertheless. While there are opportunities to develop multi-level governance frameworks with the involvement and inclusion of a complex set of partners, the required interconnectivity can be difficult to manage at different levels of government. Giving space for unheard voices, particularly among the most marginalised and vulnerable local communities can help demonstrate that planning for resilient urbanisation is both possible and achievable. It however requires new systems of governance and new relationship structures that link and integrate local governments with other levels of government, local communities, civil society and other stakeholders.



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